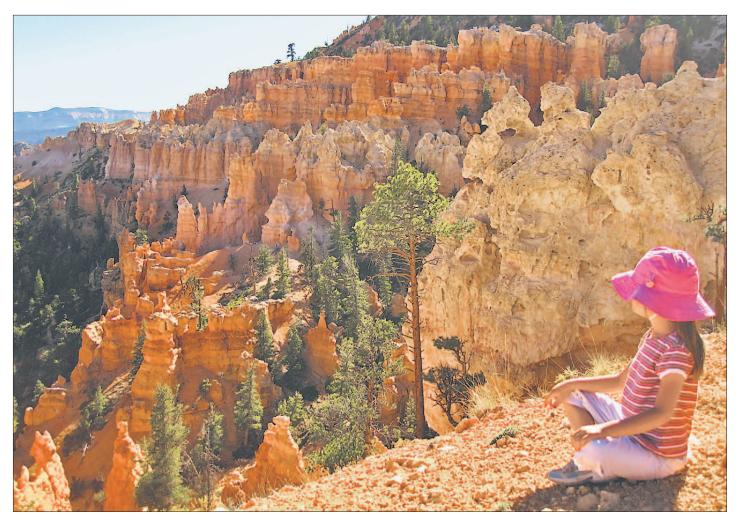
Backpacking buddies



Under-the-Rim Trail makes a great first backpack trip

By Tyler Knudsen

For The Spectrum & Daily News

"Dad, am I dreaming?" asked my 6vear-old daughter Zoe as we descended another switchback on the Under-the-Rim Trail in Bryce Canyon National Park.

It was a fitting question for the bizarre world we had immersed ourselves into.

Clearly, our minds had not yet accepted the peculiar tangerine hues or the improbably balanced spires and hoodoos that trademark the eroded edges or "breaks" of the Paunsaugunt Plateau as reality.

I had promised Zoe at the beginning of the summer her first backpacking trip — just the two of us. But every weekend filled up with other duties until we were down to the last weekend before school was to start. After Zoe reminded me of my promise, I checked my schedule and thankfully, it was open.

Bryce Canyon was an easy choice be-



cause its backcountry trails are loaded with great scenery, notoriously free of crowds and as a bonus, the National Park Service was waiving entrance fees that

With plenty of time to reach our campsite, I let Zoe set the pace which, in typical 6-year-old fashion, alternated from

SEE BUDDIES ON C11



TOP: Zoe Knudsen takes a break to study disappearing Claron lake beds. LEFT: Zoe enjoys the view down a hoodoo-filled alley in Bryce Canyon National Park. ABOVE: Life-like, boulder-topped hoodoos march up the hillside at the "Hat Shop." PHOTOS BYTYLER KNUDSEN / FOR THE SPECTRUM & DAILY NEWS



BUDDIES

a full-out sprint to a crawl. We discussed lizards, bugs, trees, and starting the first grade. Tilting her head to one side, she skeptically listened as I explained how the rocks around us once filled the bottom of a large lake called Claron that cov-ered much of this region in

and called Carlon halt overered much of this region in
ancient times.

Zoe was in her element,
and I delighted in watching
her love for the outdoors
blossom. It seemed like just
yesterday I was lugging the
wide-eyed infant around
with her strapped to my
back.

Now here she was, carrying her own pack and
leading the way.

The trail drops steeply
from Bryce Point and follows a ridge top for the first
mile, assuring sweeping
views. At one particularly
impressive overlook, Zoe
sat down to watch a playful
Clark's Nutcracker dislodgeseeds from a large pinyon seeds from a large pinyo pine cone. I scanned the hillside and could easily follow flat, orderly Claron lake beds for 10 miles or more. But with a slight refocus of my eyes, that orderly state resolved into haphazard decay created by the innumerable rivulets and gullies, tributary to the

and gaines, tributary to the Paria River, that relentlessly dissect the plateau margin. As we reached a section of the trail carved into a limestone cliff, I showed Zoe several drill holes that the trail builders filled with explosives and then

Zoe several drill notes that the trail builders filled with explosives and then detonated to break up the rock. Her sharp eyes spotted small natural cavities or "vugs" in the stone that were filled with clear, stubby calcite crystals. The trail levels considerably where it traverses the head of Merrill Hollow and then snakes out onto a sharp ridge above the "Hat Shop." Here, hundreds of boulder-topped pillars laid below us like an armored regiment marching up to conquer the hillipor. "Why are the rocks wearing hats?" Zoe asked. I tried to explain how the durable limestone cap rocks or "hats" protect the narrow columns of the sharp rocks or "hats" protect the narrow columns of the sharp rocks and luvium that elsewhere.

alluvium that elsewhere easily washes away during each rain storm.

each rain storm.
Less than a mile past the Hat Shop, we arrived at our campsite — a pleasant flat nestled amongst manzanita, juniper, and a single, towering ponderosa pine. The cool, rippled waters of Yellow Creek gurgled nearby.

or Yellow Creek gurgled nearby.

Zoe set out to explore every winding deer trail crossing through camp. I boiled water to re-hydrate our packaged backpacker's meal of noodles and tur-key. As Zoe cleaned her plate, I marveled at how the novelty of cooking on a tiny stove and eating out of a bag can make any meal irresistible for even the pickiest eater.

Temperatures dropped after the sun slipped behind the rim and we rolled out our sleeping bags. I

purposely left our tent at home. With one of the darkest night skies remaining in the country, Bryce Canyon offers unparalleled stargazing opportunities that draw hundreds of professional and amateur tronomers every year With a clear weather fore ast, it's borderline crimi nal to sleep in a tent that would obstruct your view of Bryce's brilliant night-scape, which happens to perfectly compliment the Park's world-class daytime

Zoe spotted the first star of the night. "Probably the planet

of the night.

"Probably the planet
Venus," I explained. Soon,
stars began appearing
faster than we could count.
A remarkably bright Milky
Way spanned the heavens.
Then, a meteor streaked
across the sky directly
overhead—its glowing trail
lingered for several seconds. Zoe's excitement over
the shooting star quickly
turned to concern. "Could
one of those hit us?" she
asked softly.
"One in a gazillion
chances," I guessed as the
stream's rhythmic babble
lulled me to sleep.
Apparently, Zoes wordderment of the sky kept the
awake much longer than
me. The next morning, she
enthusiastically recounted
all of the shooting stars,
bats, spaceships and other
fantastic things that I'd
missed.

After a re-hydrated

and bacon, we began our return trip. The Under-the-Rim Trail stretches nearly 30 miles from Bryce Point to Rainbow Point with several campsites along the way (backcour atong the way (backcoun-try permits required), but I knew a simple 6-mile out-and-back with a respect-able 1,400 feet of climb-ing would be challenging enough to make the trip memorable, but not so tax ing that Zoe would never want to lace up her hiking

boots again. The steady grade forced us to take several breaks. From beneath shady trees we observed the color and contrast of the chameleon like hoodoo-land evolve as the sun made its gradual

Near the trailhead, we passed a large group of day-hiking tourists speak-ing Chinese. Convinced I can understand every language on the planet
— including baby and cat
— Zoe demanded, "What did they say Dad?"
"They said they couldn't

believe that such a little believe that such a little girl could complete such a tough hike." Any fatigue her tiny body was feel-ing disappeared and she charged up the last 50 yards of trail.

As we arranged gear in the car, Zoe asked, "Are we backpacking buds?"
"Of course," I replied
with a wide smile, "we're the best backpacking buds

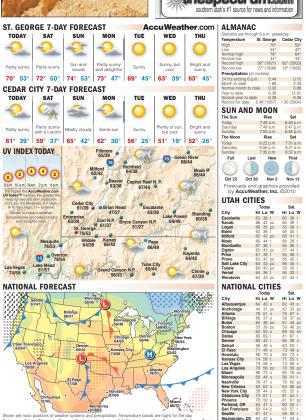
ever.
E-mail Tyler Knudsen
at tyler_knudsen@hotmail.
com





TOP LEFT: Food always tastes better when you're camping, ABOVE: Tangerine castles line the Underthe-Rim trail in Bryce Canyon National Park. LEFT: Bryce Canyon's "Hat Shop" is a dramatic example of differential erosion.







-10s| -0s| 0s| 10s| 20s| 30s| 40s| 50s| 60s| 70s| 80s| 90s| 110s| 110s|